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ABSTRACT

Reasons for which children of Bhutan learn English better than their native language, Dzongkha, are explored, including the overall language situation in Bhutan and its economic and cultural influences. Recommendations are made for increasing the learning and use of Dzongkha while retaining English in the school curriculum. The spread of English and decline in Dzongkha use are attributed to a variety of factors, including the advent of Western-style education, strong Western influences, lack of instructional resources in Dzongkha, the rise of English as an international language and a means to gain training and employment, adoption of English as a medium of instruction and easy access to English-language materials, and the high social status of English. To help students learn their native language better and forestall the loss of Dzongkha, it is recommended that more Bhutanese literature in Dzongkha be produced, the teaching and learning of Dzongkha be made more relevant and interesting, job opportunities be created for people with a Dzongkha background, training opportunities be provided for Dzongkha teachers, institutes for higher studies in Dzongkha be established, co-curricular school activities in Dzongkha be encouraged, more instruction in Dzongkha be introduced, and a Dzongkha television network and cinema be established. (MSE)

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Sonam Rinchen

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As a part of the course in curriculum theory, I was asked to write an assignment in this summer session. The task assigned is to analyze a contemporary issue prevailing in the Education system of Bhutan. The issue that we are phasing at the moment is the school children faring well in English than our national language, and as a result this is a threat to our national identity.

Bhutan, the Buddhist kingdom is nestled in the eastern Himalayas sandwiched between the two giants, China in the north and India to the south. The small population which is 0.7 million till date has a per capita Gross Domestic Product of about US $ 450, which is one of the highest in South Asia. Bhutan remained in isolation for many decades, it was only in 1960 it embarked upon a process of modernistion. Till then, Bhutan has made great progress in improving the life standard of its people.

The history of educational development can be traced as far as 747 A.D, when the first religious teacher Guru Padma Sambhawa came to Bhutan to propagate Buddhism. Various subsets of Buddhism and different schools of Buddhist philosophy evolved during the later part of the centuries (Hasrat, B.J.The History of Bhutan). In the history of Bhutanese religious teaching, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel is regarded as a great personality who came to Bhutan in 1616 A.D from Tibet at the age of twenty three. He was the most important builder of Dzongs (fortresses). Though this Dzong was primarily used for conducting political and religious affairs, they served as the centers of education and scholarships in the years to come. A monastic education was started in these Dzongs (Hasrat, B.J.The History of Bhutan). At least one male child from every family would attend a Dzong for monastic education. Traditional scholarship focused on philosophical teaching, classical scriptures and Buddhist mental and spiritual discipline.

Dzongkha is the Official language of the Bhutan, Along with Dzongkha about sixteen dialects are spoken in the Country. Dzongkha was taught in a school since inception of schools in Bhutan. However, because of the lack of learning materials in Dzongkha, a second language had to be chosen as an ancillary medium of formal secular instruction. Until 1964, the policy had been to educate in Hindi (The Official language of India). The factors which led to the

choice of Hindi as the medium of instruction was because of the affordable learning materials enabled the new system of formal secular education to set off to a quick start. In The Jesuit and the Dragon, Howard Solverson states that, " Hindi was little spoken in Bhutan, its use in the Schools had been purely pragmatic. And it was, after all the language of a neighbouring Country"(p.107). Along with Hindi medium instructional materials, Bhutan also invited majority of the teachers into Bhutan from India, as well as the Indian - style of education.

With the advent of the western education, Hindi lost its rein from the Bhutanese educational system paving its way to English. So English was adopted as the medium of instruction and except Dzongkhà all other subjects were taught in English in all the school. Since then English gained lots of popularity and was well- received by the teachers, students and administrators. They look at it like a path finder and a means of livelihood. Now as the English language is so set in our educational system, and the interest people developed for it, our national language is at the verge of extinction. In the school children are better in English than Dzongkha.

The factors which influence the gain of popularity of English in the Bhutanese Education system are as follows :

* strong western influences circulate in Bhutan,
* There is a lack of Dzongkha resources (Books & printed materials),
* English is an International language,
* English affords better job opportunities and trainings,
* English is the medium of instruction in all schools,
* There is an easy access to English materials and references,
* Dzongkha is not regarded a language which can bring development,
* Many English tourist visit Bhutan,
* English is associated with social status.

Along with Dzongkha, Sharchopikha(local dialect),and Nepali (dialect used in the southern Bhutan), English are the languages of the Bhutanese media. The only national radio broadcast (Bhutan Broadcasting Service), and the national newspaper, Kuensels also use Dzongka, English

and Nepali to disseminate national and international news to the people. Other forms of popular media in English including newspapers, magazines, novels, comics, children's storybooks and music. Videos and movies have also made their way into the country. Both Dzongkha and English are used for government administration, as well in private organisation and business. Along with Dzongkha, English is used for many Official purposes such as government announcements, many departmental and interdepartmental correspondence and discussions. English is used for all sorts of international communication including diplomacy, commerce, transport, higher education, science and technology. English language has become necessity in our daily lives. Most of the means of communication in Bhutan is convened through English. One realises the importance when she/he travels to new places. People find it difficult to identify the bus to board in and locate the seat. Most of the notices and signs are in English and people find themselves lost without the knowledge of the English.

Today, in Bhutan "Hello" has become an integral part of the Bhutanese vocabulary with people all over the country. The usual prayer before the drinks were replaced with "CHEERS". David Crystal in English as a Global, writes, " The language plays an official or working role in the proceedings of most other major international political gatherings, in all parts of the world"(p.79). Our Country has become a member of many international and regional organisation. This involvement increased the necessity for the Bhutanese to develop communication skills in English. All the above factors have led to more Bhutanese learning and using English in their daily lives. It helps people to cope with real life purposes within the country, and with other English speakers in the world.

If we turn over the pages of history, we see that the present life in Bhutan could be compared to some of those periods. With the introduction of English in our curriculum, people got a "feel" of the west and were fascinated by the progress that they have made. We always consider somebody from the west as learned and superior. The other influential factor is those studying abroad, and this has an impact on the children in particular and the society in general. In Decolonising the Mind, Ngugi wa Thiong'o wrote " In Kenya, English became more than a language, it was the language, and all others had to bow before it in difference"(p.11). From grade VII - XII, I studied in one of the schools in India, where students of different backgrounds

attended the same school. The medium of instruction was English and all subjects except for the second language were taught in English. The English language enjoyed the status of being a first language for all students. We had to always talk in English.Using our mother tongue was discouraged. In a year we spent only two months on holidays with our families and ten months in the school. Those two months in a year were the only time we got to live in our own language and culture. And as years went by I tend to like English language. I became comfortable living in that kind of culture, and pushed my Dzongkha to the background. Back at home my parents found an indifferent attitude in me and I became an influential factor to my young siblings and peers. In a way I had accepted to bow before the English language culture. Edward Kaman Brathwaite, a distinguished Caribbean poet and literary critic state that the Caribbean came to know more about English Kings and Queens than they did about their own national heroes. A similar situation exists in Bhutan. The school children are exposed to English literature during teaching- learning process. It widens the horizon of English vocabulary and a sound foundation is built up. English with its rich vocabulary leads to the exploration of other subjects of interest and make people accessible to other medias. Our people are more geared towards western movies and novels. More houses and restaurants are decorated with posters of Leonard diCaprio and Tom Cruise than with those of the revered king.

In ancient Futures, Learning from Ladakh, Helena Norberg Hodge writes about the results of English education on the Ladakhi Culture. she states that Ladhaki children are recipients of a poor imitation of an Indian curriculum, which itself is an imitation of British education, which completely lacks Ladhaki representation. It isolates children from their culture and nature and trains them to be narrow-specialist in the westernised urban environment. When children leave school they lack knowledge of using their own resources, and fail to function in their own world. The author concludes that modern education in Ladakh not only disregards local resources, but makes Ladakhi children regard themselves and their culture as inferior. Everything in the school promotes the western model, and makes children feel ashamed of their traditions. A similar situation is emerging in Bhutan, since the inception of western education .This has resulted in importing western popular culture into the homes and the hearts of the Bhutanese. There is an increasing sense of identity confusion among Bhutanese due to these

ideologies forces. Many of us, especially the young, are embarrassed about the Bhutanese culture and regard it as inferior.The International Encyclopaedia of National Systems of Education states that the decision to use English as the medium of instruction in Bhutan was made at a time when primary Education was considered, in the main, to be a preparation for secondary schooling. To have chosen Dzongkha would have created problems, since almost all teachers had to be recruited from abroad. Solverson, H. in The Jesuit and the Dragon writes that ; "Bhutan had no completely indigenous written language used mostly within the Buddhist religion, and for government documents....English, while also foreign, was an international language. Even India recognised English as one of its languages; and used it officially and quite generally. As well, English had already been taught as a subject in Bhutan's schools. And finally, the better schools that Bhutanese leaders had seen were English language institutions,(p.107). The qualified people has a better chance of getting employment and can have access to fast promotion and training opportunities. This in turn would fetch good money. So it is the dream of every parent to educate their child, which would enable him/her to rise to a good post.

As the Bhutanese perceive the change of education system from monastic to western education, which has resulted in a huge cultural shift. Monastic education was religious in nature and was responsible for teaching ethical spiritual and moral values.

It focused on communal well - being above concern for the self. But the western education in Bhutan is more a tool for material benefits rather than a principle that defines one's life. Students develop a competitive spirit which values "individualism" over the well being of others.

Western education, with English as its medium of knowledge was supposed to prepare the Bhutanese to take part in the global economy. Thus learning skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking in English has become a necessity for the Bhutanese. I fully agree to what has been said by McCrum et al; that one of the factors that contributed to the spread of English in countries where the native language(s) is not English, was that knowing English gave these countries access to economic and intellectual privileges.

On the other though Dzongkha is the national language of Bhutan, it is at the threshold of losing its identity. This fact is evident in which that students love reading English novels, and watching English movies and reading magazines, which has directly led to many Bhutanese devaluing our customs and traditions which seem inferior and outdated. Dzongkha is not given much emphasis, and the teaching and learning of Dzongkha is confined within the four walls of the classroom. The only reference in Dzongkha that Bhutanese have access to are textbooks. Most of the teachers resort to traditional method of teaching, as they lack basic teaching skills. They are not able to provide an insight into education. Students studying Dzongkha only for the sake of passing examination also contributes to the loss of language.

In a way both teachers and the students are impeded, because of the lack resources. The Dzongkha learning is limited within the horizon of the Dzongkha textbook. The other fact is owing to the limited job opportunities for people with Dzongkha background. The organisation and offices look for people with scientific background, so the people with Dzongkha knowledge only has a remote scope of getting jobs. In Decolonising the Mind, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, wrote, " the language of my education was no longer the language of my culture"(p.11). This is true in our context, the process of modernization has brought about many changes in the lives of the Bhutanese. Many of these changes, such as better educational facilities, health, housing, drinking water, have benefited the Bhutanese. On the other hand, in appreciation of the effects of these changes on our lives, we often ignore the negative consequences of modernisation on our culture and values which inform the Bhutanese identity. The same old Bhutanese saying , "You cannot be what you are not and what you are rusts while you are busy being what you are not", applies to the Bhutanese. Without a proper sense of belonging ,we could not even have the integrity of a tree, which stands firmly in its place, whatever may be going on around it.

Bhutan is at a critical moment in the history, as it struggles to maintain a balance between the modernisation and Bhutanization. With the coming western Education, no doubt Bhutan has experienced a lot of developmental activities after decades of isolation. On the other hand we are at the verge of losing our identity. The western influences are nor just external and cosmetic; but it rooted in the mind of the people of Bhutan. Western influence has become

seductive that it leads the Bhutanese to disregard Bhutanese values, culture and traditions. If we are to survive as independent identity, we should try maintaining a balance between the modernisation and Bhutanization. We need to keep in pace with the changing world, so that we are part of the modernisation process, but this should not happen at the expense of our national values. We entrust a great deal of responsibility upon the Bhutanese youth ,and look upon them as a saviour of a nation. This depends on the kind of education that is imparted to them. So now the main goal of our educational system is to prepare students to take part in developmental activities within the country and also to help students to appreciate the rich cultural heritage of Bhutan.

Following are suggestions to help students learn Dzongkha better and achieve the vision of preserving our culture and tradition, while retaining the English language in our school curriculum :

* Introduce more Bhutanese literature in Dzongkha.
* support the development of Dzongkha articles, novels, books and magazines.
* Make teaching and learning of Dzongkha relevant, challenging and interesting to the students.
* Create job opportunities for people with Dzongkha background.
* Provide training opportunities to Dzongkha teachers.
* Establish more Institutes for higher studies in Dzongkha.
* Encourage CO-curricular activities in the schools in Dzongkha.
* Introduce teaching of other subjects in Dzongkha medium(Dzongkha immersion).
* Establish our own Dzongkha TV network and cinema.

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